



Unit .25

Session .01

Jesus Tells the Kingdom Parables

Scripture



Matthew 13:1-9, 31-33,44-46

1 On that day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. **2** Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat down, while the whole crowd stood on the shore. **3** Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “Consider the sower who went out to sow. **4** As he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. **5** Other seed fell on rocky ground where it didn’t have much soil, and it grew up quickly since the soil wasn’t deep. **6** But when the sun came up, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. **7** Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it. **8** Still other seed fell on good ground and produced fruit: some a hundred, some sixty, and some thirty times what was sown. **9** Let anyone who has ears

listen.”... **31** He presented another parable to them: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. **32** It’s the smallest of all the seeds, but when grown, it’s taller than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the sky come and nest in its branches.” **33** He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and mixed into fifty pounds of flour until all of it was leavened.” ... **44** “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure, buried in a field, that a man found and reburied. Then in his joy he goes and sells everything he has and buys that field. **45** “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. **46** When he found one priceless pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it.

Intro Options



Remember, this icon means there is a Leader Pack item that goes with the lesson. See Leader Pack for additional instructions.

Main Point:
Jesus' parables teach us what the kingdom of heaven is like.

Option 1

Give each of your students six index cards. On the first three cards, each student should write one thing that he or she wants. It could be millions of dollars; it could be a house in the tropics; it could be some kind of superpower; it could be great wisdom; it could be perfect holiness; the sky's the limit.

With the other three cards, they should come up with three sacrifices or trials someone could endure. It could be something like going without talking for five years; walking on their knees on sandpaper for a mile; making a pile of quarters fifty feet high—just about anything and everything they can think of.

Collect all the “want” cards into one pile; then collect all the “sacrifices and trials” cards into a second pile. Now, pull a card from the “want” pile and read it to the group. Then pick a card from the “sacrifices and trials” pile. Ask how many students would willingly undergo the trial in order to attain the “want” on the first card. Ask why or why not. Repeat with new cards. You could also ask if students would do former trials for newer wants.

Continue the exercise for however long you wish; then point out when the students decide the wants are worth the sacrifices and trials. In today's scripture, we'll see how the kingdom is worth the cost: it will cost us everything, but we will joyfully “sell our fields” in order to get the treasure of the kingdom.

Option 2

Your kids are going to play “The Ubiquity Game.” Ubiquity means “common;” for example, Christmas decorations are ubiquitous in December. Your students will get two index cards each. On the first card, students should write down the most ubiquitous (common) thing they can think of. On the second card, they should write down the rarest thing they can think of. Collect all the cards.

Your group should now work together to make a “ubiquity spectrum.” On the one end of the spectrum should be ubiquitous: the card with the most common thing (kudos to the student who wrote that card). On the other end will be the card with the item that is most rare; fill in the space in between with the rest of the cards based on how common or rare students think things are.

Once you've made your spectrum, see what the kids wrote and where their cards ended up. Give them one final card: “the good news of Jesus Christ.” Ask them to place that card in the ubiquity spectrum. Ask them where they think it should go. We'll see in one of the parables today that the good news of Jesus should be one of the most common, regular things in our lives; we should sow it everywhere like a farmer scattering seed almost recklessly.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Matthew 13:1-9.



In Matthew 13:1-9 we see the first of three parables told about the kingdom, all of which reveal important truths about the kingdom. However, this one is incredibly crucial and unique in that it teaches that while reception to the gospel depends on the quality of the heart—the nature of the soil—the sower has no way of knowing which hearts will be receptive and which ones won't. 

In this way, the sowing of the seed—the sharing of the gospel—isn't based on our determination of who's ready or who's really good enough or who ought to hear. We are to preach the gospel anywhere and everywhere, in a way that might even seem wasteful. Why? Because while the seed will fall on all different kinds of soils, we are not responsible for someone's reception, but for our own scattering of the seed.

- **What are some characteristics of a heart receptive to the good news of the gospel? How would you characterize the other types of soil Jesus describes in the parable?**

The parable of the sower and the soils is a helpful reminder of three truths. First, Jesus taught that the Word is to be shared with all people. We have a duty to proclaim the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection, and its effect on our sin and rebellion, to all people. Second, many who hear of God's kingdom will ultimately reject it. While we should feel a burden for those who reject the gospel, there is no reason to feel guilty for their choices. Third, there will be those who will receive the Word and, through God's work within them, produce an abundant harvest of fruitful works. This should be an encouraging thought. We can be confident that our efforts in sharing the truth about Christ can be used by God to bring people to faith.

- **Which of the three soils described in this parable have you experienced when sharing the gospel? Explain.**

Read Matthew 13:31-33.



Through the double imagery of the mustard seed and leaven in Matthew 13:31-33, Jesus was teaching that the growth of the kingdom will, in the end, seem utterly unlikely and impossible. Consider the following analogy between an NFL quarterback, Tom Brady, and the kingdom of God.

It shouldn't be controversial any longer to make the claim that Tom Brady is the greatest quarterback to ever play in the NFL. It still is controversial, of course, but this has more to do with fan loyalties (and a consistent hatred outside the New England states for the Patriots dynasty) than it does on-field accomplishments and stats. Whether you admire, loathe, or are just ambivalent about Brady, there's no denying that he wasn't much to look at when he started. Drafted in the sixth round of the 2000 NFL draft at number 199 overall, he somehow looked both lanky and pudgy at the same time. He wasn't fast. He wasn't nimble. He wasn't muscular. He didn't look like much of anything. Six Super Bowls and a host of individual records later, we are all reminded of something that still never ceases to surprise us—sometimes very great things have very unassuming beginnings.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Jesus' parables teach us what the kingdom of heaven is like.

Matthew 13

1-9. Jesus used a lot of agricultural imagery in His teaching, both in His sermons and in His stories. He was using the common language of the culture around Him—sheep and goats, vineyards and vinedressers, seeds and sowers, and so on. But the way He used these images is sometimes different than the way most of His hearers would have been accustomed to thinking of them.

- The scenario Jesus portrayed of a sower throwing seed everywhere—almost willy-nilly—wouldn't make sense (at first) to the seasoned farmer. You would do whatever you could to determine the soil was fertile and receptive. It might take tilling up the soil or removing rocks. It might take clearing out the soil of bad plants, weeds, thorns, and things that would compromise flourishing growth from whatever you're planting. It might take irrigating the soil to make sure what's planted has access to the water needed for fruitful growth.
- The sower is just scattering seed far and wide with no thought at all, apparently, to the suitability of the soil. Why? We have to see these stories with spiritual eyes.

Activity

Your group has been tasked with creating “helper aids” to go along with this lesson. They will be making aids for teaching this lesson to young students. The lower school age kids had four “why” questions after this lesson. Your students are to choose one of those four questions and create some kind of aid to answer the question. The aid could be a comic strip, an infographic, a rhyme, a picture, or a short video. They can make these aids solo or in small groups. The four questions are:

- Why should we spread the good news everywhere?
- Why do some people receive the good news and other people don't?
- Why does the good news fill the world?
- Why does the good news compel us to forsake everything?

Give them some time to make their aids and then to present them. Remind them to keep things simple, as these will go to little kids.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 08, DDG)

Church and Kingdom

The church and the kingdom of God are closely related, though not identical. When the Bible speaks of the kingdom of God, it is referring to the reign of God in the world. The church is the people of God who live under His loving rule now, anticipating the full manifestation of God's kingdom in the future. The church's mission is to witness to God's kingdom, proclaiming God's message of salvation through Christ and demonstrating the power of the gospel through good works so that others may be brought to live under God's reign.

TEACHING PLAN

Jesus' ministry didn't look like much at first. He didn't recruit religious experts or politicians or zealots to become His disciples. He drafted fishermen and tax collectors. His harshest words were for those in power, and His most delicate for those deemed unreachable and even untouchable. This is not how you start a campaign for world domination, if the conventional wisdom is any guide. As Jesus defied all cultural expectations, He was ushering in the most powerful force in the universe—namely Himself—through remarkably modest means.

- **What are some other biblical stories you can think of where God took something (or someone) little and turned it (or the person) into a testimony of His own greatness?**

The kingdom of God is coming through a carpenter's son, and His band of frequently confused cultural misfits. It is coming specifically for and through those at the bottom of the barrel—the meek, the mourners, the makers of peace. It is coming in and through the God who takes on flesh to wash feet, to touch lepers, even to die.

Read Matthew 13:44-46.



Maybe the man and the merchant in Jesus' short parables represent those who wear themselves out in the pointless pursuit of the "better and more." Then one fateful day, they find it. They find the one treasure that made all their previous treasures pale in comparison. All the things they expected their previous possessions to do for them came to fruition in this one discovery. It was worth trading everything for.

This, Jesus said, is the essence of the kingdom of God. When you finally discover it—when you come into the kingdom through faith in the Son of God—you see why all your pursuits after temporary joys and riches were a colossal waste of time. True joy, true eternal riches are found in Christ alone.

- **What are some temporary joys we try to find lasting satisfaction in today? Why is Jesus better than these?**

In the end, Jesus embodied the point of these parables. He gave up everything because the kingdom of heaven is worth it. He knew His kingdom must come through Him making atonement for sins and being resurrected for eternal life. Ushering in the kingdom of God was worth Jesus giving up His very life. And because of this, the kingdom of heaven is worth giving our lives for, as well. What does it say about our faith—about the object of our worship—if we afford only minimal attention to that for which Christ gave His whole life? What does it say about what is truly most precious to us? 

- **What rivals Christ for the number one place in your heart? How can you place Him first in every area of your life?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
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Matthew 13

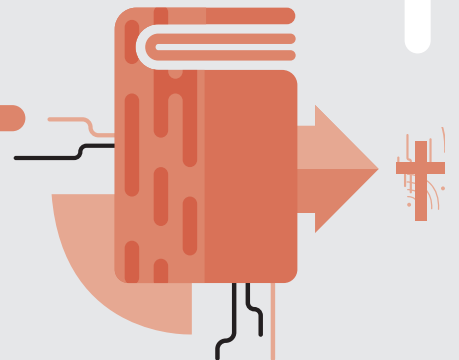
31-33. The images are quite stark in the parable: a mustard seed becomes the biggest tree, and the leaven affects the whole batch of flour. This is a parabolic way for Jesus to express what He has taught elsewhere, that in the end, the gates of Hades will not overpower the church (Matt. 16:18). Jesus is here giving us a vision of the end, so we won't be discouraged by the unassuming beginning. In another vision of the end, He says, "Look, I am making everything new" (Rev. 21:5). The kingdom's growth will be all-encompassing. This gospel of the cross and resurrection will be the down payment, as it were, for the coming of the new heaven and new earth. What Christ began in His first coming, He will consummate in His second.

44-46. There is a bit of a double meaning in Matthew 13:44-46 as it pertains to the value of the kingdom. First, we can rightly deduce that Jesus was saying the kingdom is more precious than any treasure or experience we've ever known. The man who discovers the treasure and the merchant who finds the pearl of great price are like the person who has been spending his life in the fruitless pursuit of the flesh. When a person sees with spiritual eyes the beauty of Christ, he loses his taste for his sins and worthless idols. Seeing the all-surpassing glory of Christ prompts him, figuratively speaking, to sell everything he owns (repent) and purchase this treasure (grasp it in faith).

But we don't just receive a picture of the repentant sinner coming to Christ in these kingdom parables. In a very vivid way, we also see a picture of the Son of God Himself. In the incarnation, for instance, the Son of God relinquished His divine privileges (though not His divinity itself!) to add to Himself the nature of humanity. In His earthly ministry, Jesus Christ renounced political power and cultural leverage in order to announce freedom to the captives, healing to the sick, joy to the mourners, and provision to the needy—all in order to announce the hope of Himself to sinners. And then Jesus fulfilled the mission for which He came. He submitted to the torture and the anguished death of crucifixion. He gave up what most of us would consider our own most precious possession—our lives.

(p. 10, DDG) Christ Connection

Jesus used parables to describe the nature of God's kingdom on earth. Word of the kingdom is sown broadly and will be received differently based on the condition of one's heart. For those with hearts of fertile soil, the word yields extraordinary fruitfulness causing the kingdom to grow and extend into all of the world. When Jesus returns, we will experience the full manifestation of God's kingdom.





THE KINGDOM PARABLES

Jesus' parables teach us what the kingdom of heaven is like.

JESUS CONNECTION



Jesus used parables to describe the nature of God's kingdom on Earth. The condition of our hearts determines how we receive word of the kingdom. For those with hearts like fertile soil, the Word yields incredible fruitfulness causing the kingdom to grow and extend into all of the world. When Jesus returns, we will experience His kingdom in all its fullness.



LIFEWISE QUALITY

RESPONSIBILITY – Taking ownership of my choices and behavior, including the consequences.



HEAD

Fill in the blanks about God's kingdom using Matthew 13:

- ◆ God's children have hearts that are like _____ soil and *produce fruit* (Matt. 13:1-9)
- ◆ God's kingdom starts with a tiny _____ that *grows* into a huge tree (Matt. 13:31-32)
- ◆ God's kingdom *spreads* like _____ worked through the dough (Matt. 13:33)
- ◆ God's kingdom is a *treasure* that is worth giving up _____ for (Matt. 13:44-46)



HEART

Read Matthew 13:18–23. The rocky and thorny soil represent people who hear the Word and accept it but do not grow in their faith or produce fruit. What keeps them from growing? How might these obstacles become an excuse for not participating in God's kingdom?

Jesus' parables are clear that God is fully responsible for the growth and spread of His kingdom. Its final success is not dependent on us. But God also calls us to participate in His kingdom. What kind of action or response are we responsible for in God's kingdom?



HANDS

Choose one of the following options:

1. When it comes to God's kingdom, we can't control what kind of soil someone else's heart has. But we are responsible to share about Jesus and allow the Holy Spirit to help us live in a way that shows His kingdom to people around us. Choose an attitude, a choice and a phrase that you regularly say that does not represent Jesus well and think of a positive replacement for each. Pray and ask God to remind you to choose the new options this week.

◆ Attitude:

Replace with:

◆ Choice:

Replace with:

◆ Phrase:

Replace with:

2. Being responsible means owning our own choices, actions and words. This is easy when what we did is good and may get us compliments or praise. But it's much harder when we make mistakes. This week, when you make a mistake (and you will!), choose to own up to what you did or said. If it was sinful, ask God to forgive you. And if you hurt someone else, go to them, apologize and offer to make it right.